

Wheels: An e-mail from Gary has two questions, “I have read your columns on oil change intervals with great interest, as I have a situation with a 1994 Dodge Dakota pickup truck that is left in our garage in our Michigan vacation home and not driven from mid-October until early May. I have two questions related to long-term storage of a vehicle.

1. Last fall I changed the oil and drove less than 20 miles before storing the truck until early May, 2005. I did not change oil again until this fall, at which time the oil had about 1100 miles on it. The oil looked clean and OK all summer. Is there any reason to change oil that sits in a non-operated engine for 6 or 7 months, when I return north and begin to use the truck again? Your answer in the Hamilton Journal News indicated that operating the engine causes acids, water, and carbon particles to accumulate in the oil. I think the non-operation situation is a lot closer to the oil being in the oil can, although I realize that there are some contaminants in the crankcase and in the left-over oil that did not drain out.
2. This summer after driving from May through most of July, a brake caliper stuck on the right front brake. I had to have an expensive brake job to the tune of several hundred dollars to fix this. The repair shop asked if the truck had sat without being operated for an extended time, and it had.

Can you think of other maintenance tasks that should be done because the truck has been sitting in a garage with a concrete floor for 6 or 7 months? Because it is quite cold in Michigan where we are, I take the battery out of the truck and put it in the basement, where temperatures probably do not get much, if any, below freezing. Although this question is not the typical kind of question you receive, it could also apply to people who have two cars and take one from Ohio to Florida for the winter, leaving the other in their garage here, so perhaps more readers would be interested in this than might seem to be the case at first glance. Your advice on this will be appreciated.”

Halderman: You bring up some excellent issues. Regarding not changing the oil every six months when being stored, I would agree that this would not seem to be necessary; however, moisture can accumulate in the crankcase even when not being driven. If the vehicle is going to be stored for longer than six months, then I would suggest that it be placed up on blocks with the tires off the ground. The battery should be removed and the vehicle covered to keep rodents from finding a home. For shorter periods, such as you mentioned, I would suggest that the vehicle be driven (not just starting the engine) regularly. The vehicle should be driven at least 20 miles to get all fluids up to operating temperature to evaporate all moisture and to insure proper vehicle operation. If possible, try to find a helpful neighbor or relative to perform this important duty.

